

The Quality Students' Union Framework 2020

# Contents

**First section:** Introduction to the Quality Students’ Union Framework 2020, an explanation of how verification works, a summary of the 2020 revisions, and what support is available for students’ unions.

**Part A:** Part A is designed to ensure that all participating students’ unions are able to demonstrate basic minimum standards for organisational good health. This section takes you through the descriptors with the criteria and evidence required for each one.

**Part B:** Part B is a framework to help unions work to best practice – recognizing where they are and helping them see how they can improve. Introduction

# We know how transformational students’ unions are - for students, for campuses, and for society. The NUS Charity Union Development team exists to develop excellent quality students’ unions enabling them to achieve their maximum positive impact and helping them enhance their capacity and harness opportunities available to them. We work to attract, retain and develop diverse talent in the movement. Social enterprise principles underpin our work, so we seek income generation models for some parts of our work that support our wider union development work.

# Quality Students' Unions (QSU), is a quality framework to help students' unions achieve their full potential. It outlines what good practice in students’ unions looks like across a number of themes covering their governance, leadership and management, their activities and their outcomes. It interlocks with, and complements, relevant standards and codes that also exist within the student movement such as the good governance code. It helps NUS collect and share good practice in the movement, turning this into useful advice, guidance and tools for unions to help our members be the best they can be.

# QSU is split into two parts. Part A is a basic health check, ensuring the union meets minimum standards for organisational good health, including their statutory requirements. Part B is a framework to help unions work to best practice – recognizing where they are and helping them see how they can improve. It requires a more thorough self-assessment including qualitative data.

# **Verification**

Students’ unions who are NUS Charity members can use the framework to gain external accreditation – getting verified to demonstrate their performance and enabling them to use the Quality Students’ Union branding. NUS will verify Part A submissions on request and there is an annual verification cycle for Part B. Students’ unions will have to express an interest in being verified with verifications led by volunteers from across the movement. There is an at-cost charge for verification to cover the costs of training, volunteer travel and moderation. Key verification dates, and further details about costs etc. will be kept up-to-date on NUS Connect.

# **The 2020 revision**

QSU was developed by NUS in 2013 and has been delivered in a variety of different ways since its inception. This revision of the framework takes on board feedback from unions who’ve been verified through QSU, as well as input from sector specialists, verifiers and critical friends of NUS. Information on the changes that have been made since the previous iteration are available on the Quality Students’ Union pages on NUS Connect.

We plan for there to be a three-year revision cycle from now on so this version will be valid from 2020-2023.

# **Support available**

If you have any questions about QSU, please get in touch with qsu@nus.org.uk.

NUS provides various support for its members who are using the QSU framework. If you’re interested in developing a particular aspect of your union’s work, get in touch with uniondevelopment@nus.org.uk who will be happy to signpost you to relevant resources, communities, or experts.

You can also access peer support. Get in touch with other unions working on QSU through communities of practice or through discussions on Workplace.

The whole point of QSU is to enhance the capacity of students’ unions – enabling every union to have the maximum impact they can and deliver high quality work. We know that sometimes to get here, you’ll need an extra helping hand. If this is the case for you and your union, you can source external help from consultants and organisations trusted by other unions, using the directory of consultants.

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Part A

Part A is designed to ensure that all participating students’ unions are able to demonstrate basic minimum standards for organisational good health. It also helps unions ensure they’re compliant with their statutory obligations.

Verification is available for NUS members on request and can provide piece of mind. Compliance is a pre-requisite for Part B verification. For more information on verification, please visit the QSU pages on NUS Connect.

# **Part A: Descriptors**

**1a: Strategy**

**Criteria:** The union has a strategic plan with a horizon beyond the current year. Sabbaticals, senior managers and department mangers see it as guiding their actions.

**Typical evidence:** Strategic plan.

**1b: Strategy**

**Criteria:** The union has a statement of its fundamental purpose, often in the form of a mission and/or vision statement presented in a format that is accessible to all.

**Typical evidence:** Mission and/or vision and have widespread buy-in from the union’s stakeholders statement.

**2a: Financial sustainability**

**Criteria:** The current financial position is sustainable, and the union can support its planned outgoings for the next 3-6 months without having to seek emergency loan facilities from the university or bank and has a feasible plan to reduce any unstructured debt over time.

**Typical evidence:** Annual audited/independently reviewed accounts. Cash flow forecasts. No NUS hardship application submitted in the last 12 months.

**2b: Financial sustainability**

**Criteria:** The union generates monthly financial reports within 3 weeks of the month end and annual financial reports that are appropriately reviewed.

**Typical evidence:** Examples of monthly reports and commentary presented to the trustee board.

**3a: Governance**

**Criteria:** The union has an oversight/governing body that meets regularly. Where the union is a separate organisation from the institution, there is a trustee board.

**Typical evidence:** Trustee/oversight body membership and terms of reference. Evidence of meetings.

**3b: Governance**

**Criteria:** The union has audit arrangements in place, of reports and of controls.

**Typical evidence:** Engagement letter to auditors outlining the arrangement.

**3c: Governance**

**Criteria:** The oversight body/trustee board regularly identifies and reviews risks. It agrees its risk appetite and manages risks within those building contingency plans for when risks actualise.

**Typical evidence:** Risk register.

**4: Health and safety**

**Criteria:** The union has a health and safety policy, signed by the chief executive, that is legally compliant.

**Typical evidence:** Health and safety policy.

**5: Liberation, equality and diversity and inclusion**

**Criteria:** The union has a statement or policy on equality and diversity and a plan on how to improve its liberation, equality, diversity and inclusion practice and outcomes.

**Typical evidence:** Documented evidence, e.g. equality and diversity policy.

**6: Democracy**

**Criteria:** Fair and open cross-campus ballots are undertaken for all major positions within the union as per legal compliance with the Education Act (1994)

**Typical evidence:** Documented evidence, e.g. report from the returning officer.

**7: People**

**Criteria:** All staff have legally compliant employment documentation.

The union has a set of legally compliant HR policies/procedures covering the most

important ‘people’ areas including discipline and grievance, dignity, equality, health

and safety, wellbeing, sickness absence, performance, leave and parenting.

The union has outline plans in place should staff in key positions be unable to work

at short notice or for a period of weeks/months.

The union has appraisal processes and development plans for all staff, including the

chief executive.

**Typical evidence:** Documented evidence, e.g. people strategy, statement, plan or policy.

**8: Communication**

**Criteria:** The union has some form of plan that outlines how it will communicate with its

members.

**Typical evidence:** Documented evidence/communication plan.

**9a: Participation**

**Criteria:** At least 30% members understand how they can participate in their union, in

lots of different areas from volunteering to societies, or standing as a course

representatives or officer.

The union knows the number of unique students who have participated in the union in some way.

**Typical evidence:** KPIs (key performance indicators). Example monitoring documentation.

**9b: Participation**

**Criteria:** The union shares the articles/rules of governance (or an adapted version) with

all student leaders.

**Typical evidence:** Articles/rules document. Training plans. Communications advertising the training.

**9c: Participation**

**Criteria:** Basic compliance training is provided for all student leaders, including health

and safety, finances, how the students’ union operates (including decision

making, articles of governance) and effective leadership.

**Typical evidence:** Training plans. Communications advertising the training. Committee feedback. Skills analysis exercises

**9d: Participation**

**Criteria:** The union includes student leaders (not just sabbatical officers) in the decision-

making process for grant funding.

**Typical evidence:** Documented evidence – terms of reference of societies/sports committee. Evidence of election of committee. Evidence of communications to members about how grant funding process works.

**10: Review and evaluation**

**Criteria:** Performance and delivery is measured and monitored by the union.

**Typical evidence:** KPIs. Example monitoring documentation

**11: Impact**

**Criteria:** The union is able to demonstrate its impact.

**Typical evidence:** Annual impact report. KPIs. Example monitoring documentation

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Part B

Part B is a framework to help unions work to best practice – recognizing where they are and helping them see how they can improve. It requires a more thorough self-assessment including qualitative data. Part B is not designed to be a tick box approach. Rather the union needs to demonstrate that they broadly correspond to the level they have assessed themselves as, taking into account their local context.

The quality levels are cumulative and based on improvement – to be excellent, a union needs to meet the descriptors outlined in good and very good as well. Descriptors are lettered simply to aid ease of use.

Following self-assessment, the union is able to request an audit as part of the annual verification process in order to have their self-assessment externally verified against the criteria.

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# **1. Executive summary of the union’s context**

This section is for those unions seeking verification to set the scene for their submission. This section should include:

Key statistics and information about the university/college;

Student numbers, demographic make-up, types of courses/learning, research/teaching balance and key strategic priorities for the university/college;

Key statistics and information about the union including its key activity and services, representative structures (officers/course reps), and union structure;

An outline of the union’s organisational development journey, particularly what have been the most significant developments in the last 5 years (you may want to include a longer reflection period depending on your context) and what are the most pressing development areas; and,

An outline of how the union has approached QSU and what it is looking for from the process.

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# **2. Strategy**

The students’ union strategy is the approach that it takes to translate its vision and values into actions. It outlines how these actions are prioritised and their intended impact.

**Good**

**A:** The union’s leaders can demonstrate that it has a clear purpose and vision, which is

supported by a strategy to improve its outcomes on an annual basis.

**B:** The union may have a statement that outlines its fundamental beliefs, often in the form of a set of values. There may be some examples of how these beliefs or values are translated into the union’s activities and the union may be able to demonstrate the impact of these beliefs.

**C:** The union’s strategy is in place and priorities are identified. The union can demonstrate that its day to day activities have definite links to the overall strategy and the organisation’s mission as detailed in its governing documents so it is clear how the everyday operations of the organisation contribute to the longer-term goals of the union.

**D:** The union can demonstrate a link between its strategy and the broad needs of its members. This link may be based on broad generalisations about the members’ needs

and from information from internal research mechanisms.

**E:** The union is able to demonstrate an understanding of its capacity and the limitations that this may impose on its members.

**F:** The senior member(s) of staff and officers understand the union’s overall strategy and

related plans. These may have been developed by senior staff or elected officers with some input from other stakeholders.

**G:** The union can demonstrate that its planning covers all of its major activities and sets objectives at a high level.

**Very good**

**A:** The union has a published strategy that is aligned to the needs of its members and is linked to the current context in which the union operates. The union’s members are aware of the plan.

**B:** The union has also identified its overall direction, often in the form of a vision. The union has a statement that outlines its fundamental beliefs, normally as a set of values. These values are considered when plans are created and the union is able to evidence the translation of these values into its activities. It is clear how the vision and values have been developed.

**C:** In addition to a strategy, the union has an additional document or series of documents that detail exactly what it plans to do over a fixed time period. These documents will often take the form of an operating or business plan. The operating plan has definite links to the overall strategy.

**D:** The union can demonstrate that the majority of its strategic objectives are consistent with the context of the union and therefore the specific needs of its members. Internal research mechanisms are used to collect this information.

**E:** The union is able to demonstrate an understanding of its current capacity and how

this may need to be developed to meet the needs of future members. The union can show that it has also considered the needs of future members.

**F:** The overall strategy is understood by the union’s elected officers, staff, members and stakeholders and has been developed in partnership with all of these groups. These groups feel that they have been consulted in developing the plan and can describe how they are/were involved in developing the strategy.

**G:** The union can demonstrate that its plan sets out the union’s priorities. The plan is generally holistic, covering all of the union’s main activities including what will enable the union to deliver this strategy and develop for the future, such as resource/or people planning, maintaining health and wellbeing and digital capacity.

**Excellent**

**A:** The union has a published strategy plan that has the needs of its members, both current and future, at its very core.

**B:** The union has an inspirational vision that defines an aspirational principle or an overall impact. It is clear how this vision and the union’s longer-term goals are linked to the organisation’s mission as detailed in its governing documents. The union’s strategy embodies these beliefs and values, which are clearly translated into practice and have widespread buy-in from the union’s stakeholders. As a result, the union can demonstrate how its mission, vision and values are an integral part of its day-to-day activities.

**C:** The union’s overall strategic documents define how its mission and the vision will be delivered. The union is able to very clearly demonstrate how longer-term goals are applicable in the everyday operations of the organisation.

**D:** This will often be summarised in an operating or business plan, which clearly describes how the union’s vision, values and strategic priorities will be enacted and delivered. As a result, the vision, values and strategic objectives are clearly and unambiguously linked to the actual current context in which the union operates.

**E:** The union can demonstrate that the majority of its strategic objectives are consistent with the context of the union and therefore the specific needs of its members. This is based on information from the union’s continual collection and analysis of research

and from external sources.

**F:** The union is able to show that it has a clear understanding of its current capacity. It has also given consideration to how it can develop its capacity in the future to continuously meet the needs of its members. Typically, the union has made assessments of the space it.

**G:** The union has also considered other outside factors that will affect its current and future members. These may include the availability of housing, employment and finances.

**H:** The union can demonstrate that it has dedicated time and resources to forecast the needs of future students. It may also have evidence of the results of this foresight being incorporated into its strategic plan.

**I:** The union is able to clearly show that it is able to react and adapt to changes in its members’ views and needs. The union’s structures, procedures and processes have inbuilt flexibilities that allow the union to continuously evolve to meet the future needs of its members.

**J:** The parent institution’s strategic plan has been taken into consideration when the union considered its context. The parent institution’s operating environment/context is embedded within the union’s plan and a number of synergies can be clearly seen between them. There is connectivity between the institution and the union’s strategic plans

**K:** The union can demonstrate how current officer priorities are actively included in strategic documents every year.

**L:** The strategy is holistic and encompasses all activities of the union in a way that promotes different areas working together and collaborating in synergy.

**M:** KPIs and clear review processes to show progress against strategic and operational plans are evident and live.

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When considering excellence, the verifier should be able to clearly see how a union’s plan takes its vision, context (the needs, wants and opinions of its members), environment and its capacity and translates these into a series of prioritised actions that align with the union’s values.

When evaluating a union’s strategy the verifier will consider its self-assessment statement and may ask questions such as these in interviews:

How does the union consistently improve its performance?

What does the union do to ensure this consistent improvement?

How does the union ensure that the outcomes of this improvement are consistent with the union’s individual context and the needs of its members?

How does the union’s strategic plan link to the delivery of its vision and/or mission statement?

How far is the union’s strategic plan the central document in the union that drives all its activities?

How clearly has this plan has been developed from the needs of the union’s membership, as understood from research?

Typical evidence will include:

Mission/vision/values statement Strategic plan and/or operating plan;

Underlying research data/surveys used in developing the plan -the auditor will consider whether the samples used are representative

of the entire membership; and/or,

Evidence of involvement of the parent institution in the union’s planning process. This could be in the form of a statement, meeting

minutes or similar documentation.

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# **3. Relationships and Partnerships**

Building and maintaining relationships and partnerships is an important aspect of the governance, leadership and management of students’ unions. A union has to have a strong relationship with all of its members to ensure it is fully democratic and can represent them all.

Relationships and partnerships with societies, the parent institution, other unions, NUS, other affiliated bodies and the local community ensure that a union can deliver a wide range of positive impacts to its members.

**Good**

**A:** The union understands the importance of having a strong connection with its members and can demonstrate this. While the union may have strong relationships with sections of its membership, there is little evidence of its work to broaden these relationships beyond engaged members.

**B:** The union understands the importance of how it is perceived by its stakeholders. It may also have formed an opinion of how it is perceived by others but may not have evidence to support that opinion.

**C:** The union can demonstrate a working relationship with its parent institution and other

key stakeholders in the interest in achieving its goals on behalf of its members. There is little evidence that internal relationships are actively managed.

**Very good**

**A:** The union can demonstrate that it values its relationships and connections with its members highly. The union has considered forming relationships with unengaged members and deepening relationships with engaged members, including via digital engagement. It may have also made some decisive efforts to improve these relationships, but evidence to support the success of this work may not yet be available. In many cases unions will have plans in place to allocate time and resources to improving relationships with its members.

**B:** The union is aware of how it is perceived by key stakeholders and has a degree of self-awareness. The union will have supported this by undertaking some kind of opinion-gathering work that specifically tests perceptions. It may also have considered how it can manage and improve these perceptions, but the impact of this has yet to be felt.

**C:** The union can demonstrate that it has beneficial relationships or partnerships with a number of stakeholders and NUS. As a result, there are examples of union services or activities that have been delivered or undertaken in partnership with others. The union has also dedicated time and resources to effective networking beyond its immediate stakeholders. Internal relationships are managed to promote the delivery of union activities and the achievement of planned outcomes.

**D:** The union is able to demonstrate that the institution’s plans have been taken into

consideration during the union’s own planning process.

**E:** The union can demonstrate that there is equity in the partnership with the institution and the partnership extends to all elected officers and beyond senior staff within the union.

**Excellent**

**A:** The central importance to the union of its relationships and connections with its members is apparent and implicit through everything the union does. The union can demonstrate that it invests in constantly improving these links, with clear decisions being made about allocating resources to forming relationships with unengaged members and deepening relationships with engaged members. There are specific strategies to form relationships with under-represented groups. As a result of this work, the union has built strong relationships across its entire membership and members feel an affinity to the union.

**B:** The union always considers how key stakeholders perceive it, and how this perception is managed – this may take the form of a written reputation management strategy. As a result, there is a strong and beneficial relationship or partnership between the union and some or all of its stakeholders. There are a number of clear synergies between the union and its key stakeholders

**C:** The union has proactively built and maintained strong relationships or partnerships (including digitally) with all of its stakeholders which provides benefits to its members. This is reinforced by effective networking beyond the student movement - the union has developed strong and highly beneficial relationships with other, non-stakeholder organisations. As a result, there are numerous examples of partnerships that have provided real and tangible benefits to the union’s members.

**D:** Internal relationships between departments and between staff and officers are strong, resulting in significant inter-working and demonstrable synergies.

**E:** The union is able to demonstrate that the institution’s plans have been taken into consideration during the union’s own planning process.

**F:** The union can engage with the institution using a variety of approaches and tactics on issues of interest to students and the partnership remain strong and equitable.

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When evaluating a union’s relationships and partnerships the verifier will consider its self-assessment statement and may ask questions such as these in interviews:

How does the union relate and connect to its members and key stakeholders?

How does the union use these connections and relationships to help it deliver its activities and improve its outcomes?

What is the relationship between the union and the institution like?

What has the union done to increase the quality of its contact with engaged members and to make new contacts with unengaged

members?

How is the union perceived by members, stakeholders, officers and staff?

Typical evidence will include:

Code of practice/memorandum of understanding between the union and the institution;

Reputation management statement or strategy; and/or,

Information on the identification of under-represented groups and strategies to engage with them.

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# **4. Governance**

A new Charity Governance Code has been developed for the charity sector, created to help charities and their trustees develop high standards of governance.

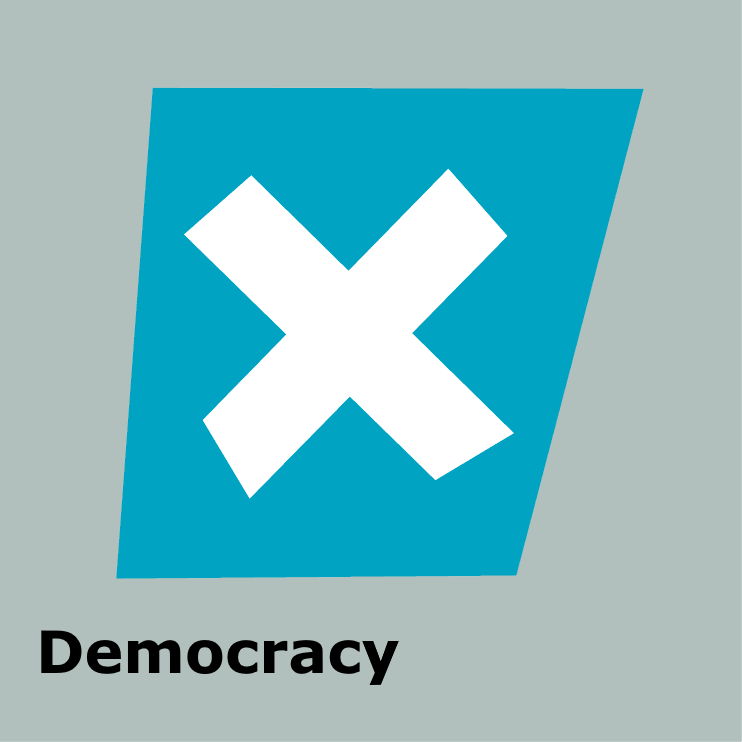
The original code was developed by a steering group, with the help of over 200 charities, individuals and related organisations. NUS has worked with unions to adapt this code to create the Students’ Unions Governance Code. This is the benchmark for good governance in students’ unions and therefore we haven’t replicated it in this framework.

In order to complete your self-assessment of the Governance section of QSU, you will need to use the SU Governance Code Wheel tool, which is available to NUS members. This will enable you to self-reflect on current governance practice and the level the students’ union is currently operating at. You can find the tool on NUS Connect.

The Governance Wheel is a simple tool that helps boards of students’ unions quickly get a sense of how well they’re functioning and fulfilling their roles. Completing it will give you an instant visual impression of the shape that your governance is in. NUS members can also arrange a Governance Peer Review using the wheel tool, bringing an external facilitator from the movement to your board to support your governance analysis. You will find the Governance Peer Review at www.nusconnect.org.uk/ud/governance-peer-review-scheme.

The term ‘board’ is used to describe the group of people who govern the students’ union and have ultimate legal responsibility for all the students’ union’s activities. It can also be known as the executive committee, management committee, council, governing body or steering committee. We also use the term CEO (chief executive officer) to describe the most senior member of paid staff.

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# **5. Democracy**

The principle of democracy is fundamental to all students’ unions and is enshrined in the 1994 Education Act. When evaluating democracy in the union, auditors will consider inclusiveness, student control, considered judgement, transparency and efficiency.

**Good**

**A:** The democratic principles of inclusiveness, student leadership, considered judgement and transparency are incorporated into everything the union does.

**B:** Fair and open cross-campus ballots are undertaken for all major office positions, in line with the requirements of the 1994 Education Act.

**C:** Students are able to influence the political direction of their union. As part of this decision-making process, members are enabled to participate in identifying problems and selecting solutions.

**D:** The information given by the union to its members is a fundamental component of ensuring that the union operates as a democracy. The union publishes information to its members about its democratic decision-making processes including logistics and key dates, digitally as appropriate.

**E:** There is clear information available for a student wanting to put themselves forward for roles such as, sabbatical officer, trustee, course representative and how to participate in elections and cross campus ballots by voting. Those who choose to participate are supported through the process by being given key logistical information.

**Very good**

**A:** The union can demonstrate that its membership is at the core of the majority of its activities and that the democratic principles of inclusiveness, student leadership, considered judgement and transparency are important to everything the union does.

**B:** The democratic system is sustainable in terms of its demands on union resources, but also appropriate in terms of its demands on the time and participation of the membership.

**C:** The union is able to show where it has attempted to ensure that members from under-represented groups become engaged in union elections, decision-making and working on issues that interest them.

**D:** Students are able to influence the political and strategic direction of their students’ union. In these two areas, members are enabled to participate in identifying problems and selecting solutions as part of the decision-making process. Furthermore, the union can demonstrate that decisions made by members are acted on in a timely way.

**E:** Information about the union’s democratic decision-making process is accessible, relevant and timely to ensure that members can contribute to the decision-making processes of the union in an informed way. Members are therefore able to make considered judgements when voting in elections and making decisions.

**F:** Most of the members feel that they fully understand how to participate in union decision making, including but not limited to, becoming a trustee, voting, standing for election and submitting a proposal to be discussed and decided upon by the membership. Those who choose to participate are trained and supported through the process to understand both the terms and consequences of their participation. Members are able to scrutinise the actions of the union and its elected officers through clear communications.

**G:** The union’s democracy is not limited to elections or formal voting processes, allowing a greater range of students to participate in the development of the union and its work.

**Excellent**

**A:** The union can demonstrate that it is established as a democratic organisation that fundamentally exists to represent the opinions, and serve the needs, of its members. As a result, members are at the heart of the union and the democratic principles of inclusiveness, student leadership, considered judgement and transparency are fundamental to everything the union does.

**B:** The union has put in place a number of effective initiatives to ensure that members from under-represented groups become engaged in union elections, decision-making and working on issues that interest them. As a result, the candidates and electorate at the most recent election, the makeup of those who participate in the decision-making of the

organisation and those who enact the union’s decisions, reflect the diversity of the union’s membership.

**C:** Students are able to appropriately determine the political, financial and strategic direction of the union. In each of these three areas, members are enabled to

participate in identifying problems, analysing options, selecting solutions and implementing their decision. Furthermore, the union can evidence that the

decisions made by members are acted on and realised in a timely way.

**D:** Information about the union’s democratic decision-making process is accessible, relevant and timely to ensure that members can contribute to the union’s decision-making and implementation processes in an informed way. Members are therefore able to make considered judgements when voting in elections and making decisions. The union is able to demonstrate that it enables members to consider the views of other members before making a decision.

**E:** The union’s members feel that they fully understand how to participate in union democracy, including but not limited to, voting, standing for election and submitting a proposal to be considered by the membership. Those who choose to participate are trained and supported through the process to understand both the terms and consequences of their participation. Members are able to scrutinise the actions of the union and its elected officers through clear communications and a process for members to raise their objections if they don’t feel represented.

**F:** Members have options to participate in the union’s democracy in a number of ways, including digitally, in order to maximise the diversity of those willing and able to contribute to the development of the union and its work.

**G:** The union can evidence developmental or educational impacts of students participating in its democracy.

**H:** The union can demonstrate how it promotes the developmental and educational benefits of participation in its democracy.

**I:** The union has digital spaces available (for example live streamed comment debates or ‘big ideas’ online voting boards) to enhance their members’ ability to engage in the democratic process online with clearly defined regulations saying how this should be carried out and how this translates to union policy.

1 The term ‘board’ is used to describe the group of people who govern the students’ union and have ultimate legal responsibility for all the students’ union’s activities. It can also be known as the executive committee, management committee, council, governing body or steering committee. We also use the term CEO (chief executive officer) to describe the most senior member of paid staff.

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When evaluating a union’s democracy, the verifier will consider its self-assessment statement and may ask questions such as these in interviews:

How inclusive are the democratic processes used by the union to make decisions, do members have an equal opportunity to affect decisions?

How well are students able to control what their union does: do their opinions shape union policy and their needs become part of the strategic plan?

How does the union help its membership to consider different perspectives as well as relevant technical information when making decisions?

How does the union ensure that its democratic processes are transparent by making sure participants are well trained and the membership can scrutinise the union’s actions?

How does the union ensure that its democratic processes are efficient, fair and robust?

Typical evidence will include:

List of election candidates and polling figures for the previous three years;

Union bye-laws or any other document that provides an overview of the democratic system;

Papers from a recent democratic meeting such as a student council/forum/general meeting and any related feedback from participants;

Evidence of a recent democratic decision;

Union publicity about elections and democratic decision making; and/or,

Tutor notes or equivalent of training for participants who take part in elections or decision making.

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# **6. People**

People are fundamental to a students’ union’s ability to deliver its activities. This section considers how a union motivates, manages, develops and engages with people to ensure they can contribute fully to the union. The people considered in this section of the

audit process are elected officers, career staff, student staff and volunteers working in the union.

Verifiers will look for either IPP descriptors, or if the union does not have IPP status, will use QSU descriptors 6.a onwards.

**Good**

**IPP:** The union has current Investors In People Standard accreditation. This means you’ve got the right principles and practices in place. And both your people and your leadership team know what’s expected of them.

**A:** There is an allocation of resources to learning and development, which may take the form of a training plan. There are some links between the training plan and the union’s strategic plan.

**B:** The union’s expenditure on staff is monitored.

**C:** Recruitment and promotion processes are secure and robust. As a result, union staff and other stakeholders are confident of the equality and transparency of recruitment and promotion.

**D:** Staff are engaged at specific points throughout the year, for example via a staff engagement survey or other tool. This staff engagement may be limited to their own areas of work. The union’s leadership can identify examples of internal communication methods that they feel are effective.

**E:** All staff have an annual opportunity to review their progress.

**F:** Processes are in place to manage the performance of all staff.

**G:** The union has given some consideration to acknowledging high performance and there may be some awareness of these processes.

**H:** The union is aware of the importance of work/life balance for its people.

It may have plans in place to formally consider or implement flexible working arrangements. Examples of where flexible working has been explored demonstrate how this policy could work in practice.

**I:** Where volunteers are given volunteering opportunities, they are given informal training for their role.

**J:** The union is aware of the link between the impact of employee experience on individual health and wellbeing and on organisational performance. Leadership have given some consideration to contributing to a healthier and happier workplace, supporting the mental health of people within the union.

**Very good**

**IPP:** The union has current Investors In People Silver accreditation. This means that not only do you have the right principles in place, but your people – and your leaders – make active efforts to check they’re happening consistently throughout your union.

**A:** The union’s strategic plan includes learning and development in various ways to achieve its aims. The union’s leadership can identify how they have created a culture of continuous improvement.

**B:** Expenditure on staffing in its entirety is reported and explained to stakeholders as well as through the union’s structures in a way that is clear and understood.

**C:** There are a few examples where investments in learning and development can be shown to have had an impact towards the achievement of strategic objectives.

**D:** Recruitment processes are monitored to ensure equality of opportunity.

**E:** There has clearly been an attempt at succession planning and development of talent across the organisation. Internally, managers have a good understanding of career progression and promotion.

**F:** Staff are engaged in the organisation. They feel they have a role in the development of the union and that they are consulted. The union’s leadership feel that internal communication systems work well. As a result, all staff feel knowledgeable and able to contribute.

**G:** All staff have an annual opportunity to review their progress and discuss learning and

development needs so they are growing in their role. There is a culture that welcomes continuous learning and the development of staff equally.

**H:** Processes are in place to manage staff performance across most areas and these are up-to-date. Staff have access to these which can be in the form of a staff handbook.

**I:** The union has some kind of reward and recognition process in place and it may be possible to identify how the process contributes to the motivation of staff.

**J:** The SU has responded to the need to ensure work/life balance for its workforce. Examples of where flexible working has been implemented demonstrate how this policy works in practice.

**K:** The union can demonstrate that volunteers are important to the organisation and they are appropriately trained for their role. There may also be evidence of development opportunities for some volunteers. Volunteers feel valued within their role(s).

**L:** The union has processes and support in place to help staff stay well and have good mental health at work. Regular ‘return to work’ conversations take place between line managers and staff to help support staff with their health and wellbeing and put in place

supportive plans, if required. Line managers are equipped to have constructive and supportive open conversations with staff about their health and wellbeing. Staff may have access to an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). Mental Health First Aiders or other forms of emergency support may be in place, which staff are aware of and use as needed.

**Excellent**

**IPP:** The union either has current Investors In People Gold accreditation which shows that your people and your leadership take full ownership of the practices you have in place to support your people. They’re actively trying to make work better for people.

or Platinum accreditation which means your policies and practices around supporting your people are embedded in every corner of your business. And in a platinum company, everyone – from the CEO to a customer services apprentice – knows they have a part to play in the company doing well, and is always looking for ways to improve.

**A:** The development and allocation of people resources is a fundamental component of the union’s planning. The union has a culture that welcomes continuous learning and development of all staff equally. There are development opportunities at all levels and all staff actively encouraged to develop their skills and knowledge.

**B:** The expenditure on staffing in its entirety is reported through governance structures and may also be explained to other stakeholders.

**C:** Improvements brought about by investments in staff training and development are routinely explained and linked to the achievement of strategic objectives.

**D:** Recruitment processes embrace equality of opportunity and monitor and scrutinise data to ensure that the workforce is talented and diverse, with shared values that can be demonstrated.

**E:** Knowledge about career progression & internal promotion is strong across all staff. The union is likely to actively promote from within, which will have resulted in a measurable response from staff. Succession planning has been considered and may be outlined in a formal written document. As a result, succession plan training and development has been delivered to individual members of staff across the entire range of staff positions.

**F:** Staff are deeply engaged in many aspects of the union beyond their job role. They feel they have a role in the union’s development, are consulted, and their opinions responded to. Staff feel they are an important stakeholder in the union. Staff feel that internal communication systems work well and, as a result they are knowledgeable about what is happening at the SU and how to contribute. There is some monitoring of internal communications that demonstrate their effectiveness.

**G:** All staff have an opportunity to review their progress and direct their learning and development at least twice a year so that they develop in their role. This is valued by staff and may be seen as a wider organisational ethos that embraces coaching and

mentoring.

**H:** Active and up-to-date processes are in place to manage the performance of all staff. Staff have good awareness of these processes and may contribute to their development. A network of support is available to staff who are not achieving their capabilities, and a

clear process exists to protect the union if this support fails.

**I:** The SU has a culture which recognises and rewards attainment and high performance. Performance measurement will generally be in line with the union’s development (e.g. attainment of KPIs). The recognition and rewards process is written and widely understood by all. Rewards are often innovative and always cost-effective. Staff feel that praise is a regular feature within the union and that recognition of performance is

a motivating factor.

**J:** The SU has responded to the need to ensure work/life balance for its workforce. Examples of where flexible working has been encouraged, implemented and reviewed demonstrate how this policy works in practice.

**K:** The union can demonstrate that volunteers are a very important aspect of the organisation and are highly valued. Appropriate systems that are in place for career staff are also used for volunteers. The union can demonstrate how it trains and develops volunteers and, in some cases, how it reviews their performance. Volunteers feel engaged and sees values in the union beyond their job role.

**L:** The union actively monitors workplace wellbeing to understand staff perceptions, create best practices, and to identify where improvements can be made to existing processes. Regular and open discussions take place between managers and their teams in relation to planning and managing workloads, healthy working practices, supporting existing health-related conditions, and other factors that may contribute to improving mental health, wellbeing and happiness at work.

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When evaluating a union’s people management, the verifier will consider its self-assessment statement and may ask questions such as these in interviews:

How is the development of staff planned to enable the union to achieve its objectives?

How does the union ensure equality?

How are the capabilities needed to lead, manage and develop people effectively defined and understood within the union, and how does the union ensure that managers are effective?

How does the union recognise and reward people’s contributions?

How are people empowered within the union? What recognition do they receive?

How do people in the union learn and develop?

How does the union measure the performance of its people?

How does the union ensure constant improvement in the way people are managed and developed?

How does the union measure employee engagement? How are actions taken as a result?

How is the health and wellbeing of staff people within the union supported?

Typical evidence will include:

Investors in People certificate (if applicable);

Other people related recognition (for example received through Sunday Times Top 100 lists, NCVO’s Investors in Volunteers etc.)

Example staff appraisal documentation;

Employee engagement survey action plans;

An organisational health and wellbeing action plan (including mental health, e.g. Time to Change pledge and plan, Mind Workplace

Wellbeing Index tool etc.);

Training and development plan for the whole organisation; and/or,

Volunteer management policy/statement.

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The QSU Liberation, Equality, Diversity 
and Inclusion logo which consists of two hands joining together with the title underneath.


# **7. Liberation, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion**

Implementing liberation, equality, diversity and inclusion (LEDI) in all aspects of work ensures that staff and members are valued, motivated and treated. fairly. When evaluating LEDI in the union, verifiers will consider inclusivity, consistency and efficiency.

**Good**

**A:** The union has a policy outlining its approach to LEDI issues. There is an awareness of LEDI policies

amongst staff and a plan to embed it into union culture.

**B:** There are support mechanisms for victims of discrimination, bullying, and harassment and a care-centred approach to making LEDI improvements, particularly for people from liberation groups. Staff feel supported to raise issues at their union to encourage the progression of LEDI inclusion.

**C:** The union can demonstrate that line managers are supported to increase their understanding of, and to engage with, LEDI.

**D:** The union acknowledges the value of learning and staff development on LEDI issues. There is a general awareness of LEDI issues amongst staff. Staff can identify gaps in their LEDI knowledge and look to the union to provide an opportunity for learning.

**E:** There is a recognised LEDI champion on the board and/or in the senior leadership team.

**F:** The union collects diversity monitoring information for people across the union

(including staff, officers, volunteers and trustees) to track the diversity of their applications during recruitment and elections.

**G:** The union acknowledges its culture is at the start of engaging with LEDI. The union can identify approaches to LEDI and staff feel that the culture needs some improvement to implement LEDI but there is willingness to achieve this at all levels.

**Very good**

**A:** The union has policies which outline the union’s commitment to equality and diversity. People within the union are aware of the union’s LEDI policies and know when and where to refer to them. LEDI policies are embedded into the union culture. Staff are reassured that questions about, or requests for, policies and benefits will be treated confidentially by line managers and HR.

**B:** The union offers a range of support to their staff which includes a key point of contact, whistleblowing forum, LEDI staff networking groups, and staff counselling. Staff are aware of and understand reporting options available to them.

**C:** The union embraces learning and staff development on LEDI issues. It can demonstrate that line managers and other staff supporting members are trained on LEDI issues and policies. Line managers feel they are supported to increase their understanding of LEDI and its policies and implementation. Line managers feel confident to discuss LEDI and can identify areas where they need extra knowledge and professional development to create an inclusive working culture.

**D:** Staff can be trained in equality and diversity and are encouraged to implement positive behaviours. Staff can identify and understand LEDI issues and their impact. Staff are engaged with their LEDI knowledge and the union provides an opportunity for learning.

**E:** The union hold up to date data on the diversity composition of their staff and volunteers. Where external agencies are used for recruitment a requirement for a ‘diverse’ shortlist is included in any request for proposal or tendering process. Staff feel the union acknowledges that LEDI is important in the recruitment and progression of staff. They can identify areas for improvement in their recruitment practice (e.g. where roles are advertised) and keep a record of staff progression against LEDI targets.

**F:** The union culture is advancing to become more equitable and inclusive. The union identifies approaches to LEDI to ensure each member of staff can fully contribute at work. The union encourages all staff to participate in a range of national and international diversity events (such as Trans Remembrance Day, International Women’s Day) and acknowledges multiple equality initiatives. The union can demonstrate that they encourage staff to reach their potential through activities and development.

Staff feel that the culture considers all people and their needs at an organisational and interpersonal level.

**Excellent**

**A:** The union has a range of up-to-date, regularly reviewed policies which outlines their commitment to LEDI across all people within the union. These are informed by best practice and can include definitions of discrimination, bullying, and harassment, including information about the law. These policies are reviewed annually in consultation with staff and other stakeholders (e.g. including autonomous liberation groups) and are informed by best practice and the law. People within the union are aware of the union’s LEDI policies and know how to raise relevant comments, questions or concerns. LEDI is valued by staff in line with the union’s broader organisational ethos.

**B:** The union demonstrates clear and unambiguous support for employees creating an environment where each person can live authentically without discrimination at work. People within the union feel able to be themselves at work. Staff are aware of and

understand reporting channels, including making clear that anyone can report an incident and how complaints are handled. There are visible and accessible support mechanisms for victims of discrimination, bullying, and harassment.

**C:** The union can demonstrate that line managers and other staff supporting members are given guidelines to implement policies fairly and consistently. All line managers feel they are encouraged and supported to increase and consolidate their understanding of LEDI and its policies and implementation. As a result, staff are supported to approach LEDI with confidence and are able to create a positive working environment for all.

**D:** All staff are trained in LEDI issues and are encouraged to implement positive behaviours to improve the working relationships of staff and contribute to a positive working culture. The impact of training is recorded and reported to measure success and identify areas of improvement. Staff are deeply engaged with their LEDI knowledge and the union provides multiple opportunities to enhance organisational knowledge and practice.

**E:** The union is actively benchmarking against the wider sector including reporting on gender and ethnicity pay gaps. The union has set clear targets and supporting

action plans to improve the make-up of its workforce. This is monitored internally and reported to the trustee board.

**F:** There is clear evidence that the union has a culture that is inclusive and equitable for all staff and volunteers. The union takes into consideration LEDI to ensure each member of staff can fully contribute at work. The union can evidence that they are positively

empowering staff to reach their potential through a range of initiatives and activities. The diversity events and activities the union undertakes supports areas of LEDI the union recognises it needs to improve. Staff feel they can contribute and participate at work with their colleagues. Staff feel that the culture acknowledges all people and their needs at an organisational and interpersonal level.

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When evaluating a union’s people management, the verifier will consider its self-assessment statement and may ask questions such as these in interviews:

How current, effective and relevant are the union’s policies on LEDI?

How does the union ensure that the LEDI processes are fair, transparent and efficient?

How does the union measure the effectiveness of its LEDI procedures?

How does the union ensure LEDI is embedded?

How is the union actively encouraging diverse candidates to participate or work in the union?

How is the union’s culture inclusive? Are there reported incidents of prejudice, discrimination or bullying?

How does the union track progression of diverse groups? Is there a fair allocation of stretch opportunities and development?

How is the union consistent with exit interviews and difficult conversations?

Typical evidence will include:

Relevant equality and diversity policies;

LEDI strategy/action plan;

Evidence of LEDI events, communications, and levels of participation; and/or,

Diversity monitoring data (recruitment, pay gap reporting, progression, etc.).

Dotted line to indicate end of section



# **8. Communication**

This section of the audit considers how the union communicates with its members and

other stakeholders, the quality of that communication and how successful the union

is at getting its messages out.

**Good**

**A:** The union can demonstrate that it communicates with its members and is receptive to

communication from them. Outgoing messages are almost always associated with a specific activity or event and are unrelated to other messages.

**B:** The union’s engaged members understand parts of what the union does. These members are aware of a mechanism for giving feedback to the union.

**C:** The union is able to demonstrate that it has two-way communications with its parent institution.

**D:** The union brand is being developed.

**Very good**

**A:** The union demonstrates that it gives information to, and seeks the views of, its members and stakeholders in a considered way. The union has a section within its strategic plan that specifically addresses communication and includes digital engagement. As a result, communication is planned and conveys key messages.

**B:** Members feel that that know what is happening in their union. The membership as a whole has an understanding and knowledge of the union’s activities, operations and key messages. Across the entire membership this understanding is notably stronger among engaged members. Additionally, this awareness is often far stronger in some area than others, typically around events. There is widespread knowledge among the union’s members of its feedback mechanisms. Members feel that the union acts in a way that is

mostly open and transparent and that their views are listened to and generally acted upon.

**C:** The effectiveness of the union’s communication is apparent due to level of general awareness among its members. Various communication channels are used, including digital ones, however, their effectiveness is not quantified or measured against any targets. As a result, knowledge of the value of particular communication mechanisms or the success of particular messages is not known.

**D:** The union typically uses tailored communication methods based on contexts and messages designed to reach different groups of students. There are examples of the union planning or trialling new methods to improve its communication with

under-represented groups, including digitally.

**E:** The union is able to demonstrate effective and constructive two-way communications with its key stakeholders.

**F:** There are definite consistencies or patterns within the union’s communications, indicating that thought has been given to the union’s brand. Members are able to recognise the union’s brand.

**Excellent**

**A:** There is a strategic approach to communications strategy as part of the union’s strategic plan, which has the overall aim of promoting member engagement, participation and transparency or other priorities in the union’s strategy. Digital engagement is a core feature. Key messages are conveyed using a range of communication methods over extended periods of time. As a result, members feel that the union’s communication methods give them the appropriate knowledge to enable them to actively participate in the union.

**B:** The membership as a whole has a detailed understanding and widespread knowledge of the union’s activities, operation and key messages. Members are able to identify a number of the main roles of their union and feel the union acts in a way that is open

and transparent. Knowledge of, and access to, one or more feedback mechanisms is strong across the entire membership. There is a clear link between members’ input/feedback and action. Members feel they can effectively contribute to their union.

**C:** The effectiveness of the union’s communication is clear and measured. The union has also set targets for communication, and performance against these targets is scrutinised by the governance structure. The union may have considered benchmarking its performance against others both inside and outside of the movement. As a result, the union has a strong understanding about which communication methods work and

which do not, for various segments of its membership. This knowledge may also help the union to make informed decisions about investment in communications.

**D:** The union’s communications are dynamic, proactive, innovative, responsive and specific to the needs of its membership. Typically, the union uses tailored communication methods based on contexts and messages specifically designed to reach different groups of students, including methods to target under-represented members such as

placement students and distance learners. These mechanisms include face-to-face communication.

**E:** The union is effective in its communications with all its other stakeholders and is able to demonstrate effective two-way communication and demonstrate that its key messages are widely known and understood.

**F:** The union can demonstrate that it understands the value of its brand. It is able to show that its brand has been considered in its strategic plan/ communications plan. The union has very high levels of consistency in the messages that it communicates, which

continuously reinforce its brand. This is seen throughout the union. Members are able to identify key features of the union’s brand.

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When evaluating a union’s communication the verifier will consider its self-assessment statement and may ask questions such as these in interviews:

How does the union communicate effectively with its members and other stakeholders?

How aware are its members of the objectives and activities of the union, and their outcomes?

How does the union measure the effectiveness of its communications?

How does the union ensure that it communicates with all of its members?

How does the union ensure that its members and other stakeholders can easily communicate with it?

Typical evidence will include:

Overall communications strategy;

Examples of membership communications (e.g. recent emails, social network communications etc.); and/or,

Examples of brand propositions/plans.

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# **9. Services**

This section of the framework covers everything from a students’ union’s mental health support, employability workshops, its athletic union to its shop and night bus – essentially everything that the union provides for its members - including how the union has decided what to offer and the quality of its services. The services a union provides may be very different to that of another union, therefore they’ll have very different health and impact indicators. Large unions will not have to list every service that they provide and how they meet these metrics but should instead look at how their practice aligns with the descriptors in this section across the portfolio of services they offer.

**Good**

**A:** The union offers, directly or through a partner, a number of services to its members. These services will have often developed over time and are in line with services offered

by other students’ unions. It is probable that the services generally serve the current needs of the union’s members but this has not been tested and cannot be evidenced.

**B:** The union can demonstrate one or more occasion when it has made a change to a service it provides in response to members’ needs.

**C:** The union believes that the services it delivers either directly or through a third party are of a good quality but may be unable to demonstrate this empirically and the majority of the service offering has been static for some time.

**D:** There is some recording of data, from the union’s income-generating services (where these exist) and proper case recording in advice services (where these exist). There may be an expectation for performance, perhaps as year-on-year comparisons. The union is

aware of the performance of its income-generating services (where these exist) and is able to demonstrate appropriate remedial actions where these services were failing to meet expectation. It may have sought external support to develop these actions.

**E:** Where its services are delivered by partners or other third parties, the union typically also passes on quality control and therefore has little additional input. There may, however, be opportunities for members to feedback directly to these service providers.

**F:** The union considers how its services link into its representation, campaigning and partnership work.

**Very good**

**A:** There are examples of services that have been created, adjusted or developed in response to member feedback. At least some services are consciously operated in direct

response to member needs.

**B:** Where the union is restricted (in its space, finances or other restriction), it has considered alternative ways of offering services. The services that the union offers are well used by its members.

**C:** The union demonstrates the quality of its services by using user or income data that is routinely recorded and reported. There may also be some user feedback on the overall quality of a service or elements of a service but there is only limited evidence of substantive actions in response to this feedback.

**D:** The union monitors the performance of most of its services, often using hard indicators such as income or participation numbers. In advice services (where these exist), the union should be able to describe the profile of its advice casework including issues and demographics. The union has set out some expectations for the performance of its services based around these hard indicators. As a result, there is scrutiny of performance through the union’s governance structures, which has ensured appropriate remedial actions where services were failing to meet expectations.

**E:** There are examples where the union has opted to work in partnership within other organisations or companies to develop the quality of its services (for example by undertaking a commercial health check with NUS’ Trading Support team).. As a result, the union is able to demonstrate that its members receive a better service. The union is able to demonstrate some level of input over the quality of services that it has passed over to a third party.

**F:** There is a degree of connection between the majority of services and activities that the union operates directly and facilitates indirectly. The union can demonstrate areas where the way its services are run, support its representation, campaigning and partnership work.

**G:** Where realistic, services are available remotely for students (for example online advise sessions, club and society membership processes, union shop etc.) and the union is willing to try out new initiatives, platforms and services as they become available.

**Excellent**

**A:** The services offered by the union, either directly or through a partner, are intrinsically linked to the current needs of its members and the union context. This link has been planned for through the union’s strategic planning process.

**B:** Where the union is restricted (in its space, finances or other restriction), and therefore limited to deliver key services identified by members, they are delivered in alternative ways. In some situations, this may be in the planning stage and not yet in place but a board-level commitment has been made.

**C:** As a result of the union’s approach all the services it provides are well used and highly valued by its members. The union can demonstrate that it delivers effective, high-quality services. Staff in each service area are aware of feedback and KPIs have been set. The union is able to demonstrate that in all areas it is focused on providing the very best service it can to members (and other consumers). This high level of customer service is

very apparent. As a result, members are very satisfied with each service.

**D:** The union has clearly defined the outcomes it is striving to gain from each of its services. These outcomes are often targets that directly address the union’s strategic priorities or detailed financial targets and connect the student experience with the union’s representative work to the institution and beyond. There may also be examples of services that deliver both. Each service has multiple and carefully selected measurement mechanisms that allow performance to be monitored. As a result, there are clear success criteria for each service that support effective management and enable the union’s governance structures to monitor performance. Knowledge of how each service is performing is high. Services are in line with, or exceed, their targets. Where this is not the case, the union can demonstrate remedial actions. In some cases, the union will benchmark its performance against other comparable organisations.

**E:** There are mechanisms in place to consider the best delivery mechanism for services, to ensure that the highest level of quality is achieved. For example, in advice services this could mean online support, peer group support, good triage processes etc. As a result, there are often examples of the union opting to work in partnership with other organisations or companies to further develop the quality of its services and regularly reviews how the union is delivering the service. This could be in-person, digital, in

batches or 1-2-1, highly personalised or standard options. If the union is a NUS purchasing consortium member, it regularly accesses the support offered by the trading support team to ensure its offering is of maximum impact and quality. Where the union has sought to deliver services to its members through a third party there are formal control mechanisms in place to ensure the service is delivered to the highest possible standard. Additionally, where these services are provided outside of the building the union can demonstrate clear attempts to influence the quality of the service where appropriate.

**F:** The union operates its services in an ethical manner that is in line with the union’s values and prevents internal competition or conflict while promoting a strong brand. It’s services demonstrably contribute towards the achievement of the union’s aims and commercial operations demonstrate behaviours in line with those aims. Services that are provided in conjunction with, or solely by, a partner also comply with this ethos.

Most of the union’s services, in the way they are run, support its representation, campaigning and partnership work. This could be the union always having a non-alcohol option as the cheapest on the menu if it is working against alcohol harm, or, being a living wage employer if it has campaigned for employment rights. As a whole there is a sense that each individual service, however it is delivered, is cohesive with all other services to bring about an overall synergy.

**G:** The union collects and analyses data they’ve obtained from their services provision (e.g. EPOS reports) alongside other data sources to map user journeys, using this information to enhance student engagement levels.

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When evaluating a union’s services the verifier will consider its self-assessment statement and may ask questions such as these in interviews:

How does the union ensure that its services are effective and of a high quality, with improvement plans in place?

How does the union ensure that its services match the needs of its members in terms of the services on offer and how they are delivered?

Do members feel the union provides them with the right services in the right way?

How does the union work with others to provide services?

Typical evidence will include:

Strategic and/or operating plan (already collected);

Example departmental/service plan; and/or,

Recent research data/feedback on one union service.

Dotted line to indicate end of section



# **10. Participation**

This section of the framework covers everything from a students’ union’s athletic union to its shop and night bus –essentially everything that the union provides for its members - including how the union has decided what to offer and the quality of its services. The services a union provides may be very different to that of another union, therefore they’ll have very different health and impact indicators.

**Good**

**A:** The union is able to demonstrate that it provides a range of opportunities for members to participate in its activities.

**B:** The union can demonstrate opportunities by which groups or individual members can contribute to its decision-making processes.

**C:** The union has considered improving the quality of member participation and how to support members who wish to participate in national campaigns and link to appropriate national bodies.

**D:** The union ensures health and safety requirements of student activities are met.

**Very good**

**A:** The union can demonstrate that it provides a wide range of participation opportunities to its members and actively promotes them. As a result, members have a good awareness of participation opportunities.

**B:** Most of the union’s groups and individual members have some understanding of how to contribute to its decision-making processes.

**C:** The union assists members to volunteer and supports them in doing so by providing training and support. While the union may not have achieved the Investors in Volunteers standard, there is evidence of its achievements in some of the indicator areas.

**D:** The union encourages students to design their own opportunities and attempts to make processes as easy to use as possible.

**E:** Where the union supports student media, the teams are connected with the national student media groups and (if resource allows) members of the Student Radio Association, Student Publication Association & National Student Television Association.

**F:** The union is taking action to improve the quality of member participation. The union can demonstrate that it supports members who wish to participate in national campaigns and link to appropriate national organisations. Members feel that they have a strong input into aspects of the running of the union.

**G:** Student leaders are encouraged and supported to record and reflect on the skills and

experiences developed through their participation with the students’ union.

**Excellent**

**A:** The union is able to demonstrate that it has dedicated time and resources to developing participation opportunities and promoting exciting opportunities to all its members. The union also has specific strategies to promote participation opportunities to under-represented groups. As a result, a broad range of students actively participates in the union. Additionally, there may be examples where this promotion of participation has led to an individual member engaging with the union for the first time.

**B:** The union can demonstrate that it has a highly innovative range of opportunities for its members to contribute to union decision-making. The union is able to demonstrate decisions that have resulted from these opportunities. Union groups and members fully understand how to contribute to union decision-making processes.

**C:** The union actively encourages its members to volunteer and supports them in doing so by providing training and support. The union also understands the two-way process of volunteering and the benefits it brings. Volunteering opportunities are meaningful and provide a double benefit (improving the skills, experience, confidence of volunteers whilst making an impact on peers/local community/the environment). Where there are volunteering opportunities, the union has achieved the Investors in Volunteers award or complies with its criteria.

**D:** There is evidence of where students have designed their own opportunities, and processes were simple to use. The union can evidence how students were aware of their health and safety requirements.

**E:** The union has clear strategies to improve the scale of participation in union activities and develops its members to enable them to participate as effectively as possible. The union can show that it proactively supports its members to participate in national campaigns, and link to appropriate national bodies, encouraging and facilitating individuals and groups of members to take part. Members feel very strongly that the union is ‘their’ union and know how they can participate in all aspects of the union.

**F:** The union can demonstrate how participation with the students’ union has developed members’ skills and experiences.

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When evaluating a union’s participation the verifier will consider its self-assessment statement and may ask questions such as these in interviews:

Do the union’s members feel able to participate in activities organised by the union, and how easy is this for them?

How does the union measure and increase participation in its activities?

How does the union update and evolve activities on offer, and how does it learn from other organisations?

How does the union measure member satisfaction and improve the opportunities it offers?

Typical evidence will include:

Data on participation in activities (e.g. club and society membership numbers);

Demographic data comparing the profile of the student body and union activity participants;

Data on student satisfaction with the union; and/or,

Evidence of union members’ engagement in national campaigns/events.

Dotted line to indicate end of section



# **11. Representation and Campaigning**

At the heart of great students’ unions are functions to represent students and create change with –and for –them. Students’ unions should use a range of channels to represent its members to the institution, the local community and nationally.

**Good**

**A:** The union facilitates an academic representation system and provides some

support and training to representatives. There is a broad understanding of the role of the

representative system, which is agreed by the students’ union and the institution/college.

**B:** The union can demonstrate that its students have an input into at least one institution

meeting relevant to the role of the representative to present students’ perspectives.

**C:** The union can show that its elected officers join national campaigns.

**D:** The union can show evidence of when it has supported individual members or groups of members to campaign.

**Very good**

**A:** The union has developed materials for course representatives that communicate the main aspects of the role. Comprehensive training is provided and well attended by representatives. As a result, course representatives are aware of the main aspects of their role and how to undertake their activities. There is specific staff support for the

academic representation system.

**B:** The union can demonstrate that its students input into a number of institution committee meetings at different levels of decision making.

**C:** It can also demonstrate that the representatives are able to make strong representations at these meetings as a result of preparation, including research into the issues under discussion. As a result, student perspectives are communicated and considered when major decisions are made.

**D:** The union can show evidence to demonstrate that its elected officers participate in national campaigns, participate in networking with other officers, and attend relevant national events.

**E:** The union supports individual members and groups of members to campaign and can

demonstrate examples of where it has helped to improve the effectiveness of member-led campaigns.

**Excellent**

**A:** The union has a comprehensive training, support and development programme for academic representatives which is delivered throughout the duration of the role. In some cases, responsibility for support of the representation system is undertaken in partnership between the union and the institution. Monitoring and evaluation shows that academic representatives feel they have the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively represent union members’ views to the institution.

**B:** The union can show evidence that students are represented at every relevant institution committee. These formal representations are reinforced by the union’s elected officers, academic representatives, and key institution staff members.

**C:** The union can demonstrate that its representatives are able to make highly effective, accurate representations/interventions at institution committee meetings. This effectiveness is due to thorough preparation including an evidence-based understanding

of the views of students on major issues. The union can demonstrate a number of impacts that have been a direct result of this representation.

**D:** The union can also show that its elected officers and other members participate in national campaigns and represent the views of the union’s members nationally.

**E:** The union proactively encourages individual members and groups of members to run campaigns. The availability of this support is well communicated. The union can demonstrate robust mechanisms to improve the effectiveness of member-led campaigns, often by providing training and/or advice.

**F:** Union-supported campaigns have a defined objective or impact and the union is able to point to successful past campaigns.

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When evaluating a union’s representation and campaigning, the verifier will consider its self-assessment statement and may ask questions such as these in interviews:

How does the union effectively represent the views of its members and what are some of the mechanisms used to achieve this?

What changes have been made in the institution as a result of the union’s work?

How does the union ensure that the institution views it as the primary source of student opinion?

How does the union ensure that the views of its under-represented members are heard effectively?

How does the union support its members to campaign, and what successes has it achieved as a result?

Typical evidence will include:

Course/school rep training materials;

Evidence of institution meetings where the union has made changes to institutional policy;

Campaign materials developed by the union; and/or,

Evidence of participation in NUS events/programmes.

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# **12. Sustainability**

Through sustainability initiatives on campus, alongside the content of the taught curriculum, students can graduate from their education being equipped to deal with the global challenges we currently face. Good sustainability management is

now synonymous with good organisational management. Students’ unions have long been at the forefront of this activity, and Green Impact is a UNESCO recognised framework for union staff, officers and students to collaboratively address

key issues to transform into a sustainable union and campus environment, tried and tested over more than a decade.

**Good**

**A:** The union has current Green Impact good status.

**Very good**

**A:** The union has current Green Impact very good status.

**Excellent**

**A:** The union has current Green Impact excellent status.

Dotted line to indicate end of section

When evaluating a union’s sustainability, the verifier will consider its self-assessment statement and may ask questions such as these in interviews:

How are people equipped to enable the union to achieve its sustainability objectives?

How does the union embed sustainability across all areas of its work?

How does the union recognise and reward people’s contributions?

How does the union measure its sustainability performance?

How does the union ensure constant improvement in the sustainability is enhanced?

Typical evidence will include:

Green Impact audit reports and/or certificates and awards.

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# **13. Insight and Learning**

Constant review and evaluation is critical for any organisation. This is particularly important in students’ unions, which have ever-changing leadership teams. This section of the audit considers a union’s insight gathering and use, its review process and practicalities, and how these fit into its overall planning process.

**Good**

**A:** Review and evaluation is an aspect of the governance, leadership and management of

the union and the union demonstrates that it has mechanisms to collect data in a way

that can be scrutinised.

**B:** The union can demonstrate that it promotes effective governance through the consistent use of some form of measurement or indicators.

**C:** The union’s members have some knowledge of the areas in which the union is

performing well.

**D:** The union has mechanisms in place to help understand its members’ wants, needs and perceptions. As a result, the union understands the broad needs of its members and this is rooted in evidence.

**Very good**

**A:** Review and evaluation is an aspect of the governance, leadership and management of

the union. As a result, the union has an understanding of its performance in key,

strategically important areas such as finance.

**B:** The union can demonstrate that it has mechanisms to collect data and create

comparisons over set time periods to enable effect governance.

**C:** The union uses KPIs or other comparable measurement tools in conjunction with

narrative reporting to provide an assessment of its performance, both internally and externally. The union have given consideration to developing mechanisms to identify, review and evaluate its soft impacts.

**D:** The union’s members feel that they understand how their union is performing overall.

**E:** The union has mechanisms in place to routinely analyse its members’ wants, needs and perceptions. These mechanisms typically range from large-scale opinion polling to the informal gathering of individuals’ views. As a result, the union has a detailed understanding of the majority of its members, rooted in evidence.

**Excellent**

**A:** Review and evaluation are clearly demonstrated as a fundamental aspect of the governance, leadership and management of the union. The union is fastidious in its

approach to evaluation, constantly measuring and evaluating the effectiveness of its activities. As a result, the union has a strong understanding of its own performance and how it impacts upon its members.

**B:** The union uses sophisticated evaluation tools that provide detailed information on performance and areas for improvement. These tools are accessible and aid detailed

scrutiny and opportunities to challenge actions through the governance body.

**C:** The union can demonstrate the process it has used to identify the most important and informative KPIs for external communication. To assist transparency, the union will have

typically identified what is key, and selected KPIs accordingly. The union uses these KPIs in conjunction with narrative reporting to provide a clear assessment of its performance.

Additionally, the union selects KPIs that allow the assessment of progress against objectives stated in its strategic plan.

**D:** Internally, the union makes highly effective use of well-presented KPIs supported by a narrative reporting to enable effective governance. While there is some consistency in the KPIs it uses, the union is able to demonstrate its flexibility to modify KPIs to reflect changes in strategic priorities. The union uses both qualitative KPIs (such as satisfaction), together with external benchmarking, in at least some areas to enable the review and evaluation of soft impacts.

**E:** The union’s members have a detailed understanding of how their union is performing, how this performance relates to them and the areas in which it could improve.

**F:** The union has a range of mechanisms in place to continually examine the wants, needs and perceptions of its members. It has developed ways to canvass the opinions of its members and has specific strategies to target under-represented groups. The union specifically examines how it has impacted on its members in the past. As a result, the

union feels confident that it understands its entire membership, and how they engage with the union, as far as practically possible.

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When evaluating a union’s insight and learning the verifier will consider its self-assessment statement and may ask questions such as these in interviews:

How does the union evaluate and review what it does on a regular basis?

How does the union use this evaluation to drive constant improvement?

How does the union ensure consistency in its evaluation methods across the organisation?

Do members understand how effective the union is in providing services and bringing about change for them?

What data sets does the union use to inform its work?

Typical evidence will include:

Example completed self-evaluation document on a service or the whole organisation and/or,

Example report to the trustee board from the senior staff member updating the board on progress against agreed key performance

indicators (KPIs)

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